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ABSTRACT

The Core Program replaces a 54-credit, distributive approach to general education with a 45-credit, integrative and interdisciplinary set of semester programs very evenly spread out over the four years of college education. In place of a required number of courses from several separate departments, Core involves a 6-credit interdisciplinary course in all but the last of the eight semesters usually taken by the student. The move to Core demanded radical changes in schedules, in departmental offerings, in course assignments, and in many other long-held policies and ideas. The institutional commitment to Core expressed the judgment of the entire Saint Joseph's College community that general education is at least as important as the student's major. The structural reminder of this commitment is the central role which the Core Program fills in the College's course offerings throughout all four years of the normal bachelor's program. (Author)

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THE CORE CURRICULUM

AT

SAINT JOSEPH'S COLLEGE

RENSSELAER, INDIANA

HE 007 780

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THE "CORE" CURRICULUM AT SAINT JOSEPH'S COLLEGE

Coordinator: John P. Nichols, S.T.L., Ph.D.

I. A Brief Sketch of the Switch to Core

The original thrust for sweeping revision of the college's general education program came from the newly appointed President of the College, Father Charles Banet, C.PP.S., in the fall of 1966. The attention of the President and the college community in general was brought to a focus on this issue by the concurrent influences of several different agencies: the Second Vatican Council document on "The Church in the Modern World" had been provoking serious reflection on the part of some of the faculty for quite a few months; the National Catholic Educational Association had just published "The Danforth Report and Catholic Higher Education"; and articles on curriculum revision had been very much in evidence in professional journals. President Banet challenged all the academic departments of the institution to respond in a creative way to these calls for educational reform, but to respond in terms of the specific goals and purposes of Saint Joseph's College. The response of the faculty, by spring of 1967, was so encouraging that a select faculty committee on curriculum revision was established to initiate the process of change.

An H.E.W. grant was secured to subsidize the work of the committee during the academic year 1967-68. All the academic areas of the college were represented on the committee, not just those which offered courses in the general education program, because one of the main objectives of the whole project was to bring together the entire academic community of Saint Joseph's in this rethinking of the college's educational program.

Of all the consultants brought in, of all the programs studied, the committee was most impressed with what Florida Presbyterian (recently renamed Eckerd College) had done with its curriculum. What the committee presented to the Faculty Assembly at the end of its deliberations essentially consisted of the Florida Presbyterian integrative approach to general education modified to suit the specific goals and realities of Saint Joseph's College. The faculty enthusiastically adopted the new curriculum in November of 1968, and began implementing it with the freshman class of September, 1969.

II. Objectives of the Core Program

Saint Joseph's College adopted the Core Program because it was seen to be a better way to achieve the goals and purposes of the institution, a Catholic liberal arts college, than the more traditional approach to general education. Core is integrative, rather than distributive, in its structure. Core gives the entire student body, and as many members of the faculty as possible, a common experience in reflecting on man, his situation, civilization, and culture, his achievements and problems, his meaning and purpose.

The switch to Core demanded radical changes in schedules, in departmental offerings, in course assignments, and in many other long-held policies and ideas. But what was asserted most emphatically in the change-over was that the institutional commitment to Core expressed the judgement of the whole

Saint Joseph's College community that general education is at least as important as the student's major. The structural reminder of this commitment is the central role which the Core Program fills in the college's course offerings throughout all four years of the normal bachelor's program.

In order to offset the trend toward hyper-specialization or vocationalization in most of the American higher education, Core is strongly generalist and humanistic. It emphasizes the project of becoming a "self worth being", of leading a genuinely human existence, as the basic issue of liberal education. Though the content of each semester of Core varies, the program maintains an overall common and constant concern for human values, a concern which either is carried over from Core into other courses by both students and faculty or reinforces the humanistic perspectives already present in those courses.

Finally, any number of more specifically philosophical positions are implied in either the interdisciplinary or the personalist commitments of the Core Program. Core stands against the depersonalization of man that is the bent of the reductionist type of thinking of so many contemporary intellectuals. The program maintains an openness to insights into the nature of man and the human situation that come from a whole range of academic disciplines and methods. No method which can shed light on human meanings and values is theorized out of existence or into nonsense on an apriori basis. The traditional approach of the liberal arts is broadened to welcome the fruits of the studies of modern psychology, sociology, and other sciences of man. But what Core strives to do is to inform with a common purpose the whole mass of conflicting interests spawned by the hyper-specialized curricula of the mainstrean of contemporary higher education.

III. Structure of the Core Program

A. In general

The Core Program replaces what used to be a 54-credit, mainly lower level and distributive approach to general education with a 45-credit, integrative and interdisciplinary set of semester programs very evenly spread out over the four years of college education. In place of a required number of courses from several separate departments, Core involves a 6-credit interdisciplinary course in all but the last of the eight semesters usually taken by the student.

The following table shows the simple structure and rhythm of the Core program:

Freshmen:	Core 1——The Contemporary Situation (6 credits)
	Core 2——Hebrew and Graeco-Roman Heritage (6 credits)
Sophomores:	Core 3——The Middle Ages (6 credits)
	Core 4——The Modern World (6 credits)
Juniors:	Cores 5 & 6-Foundations of Science (6 credits)
	Cores 7 & 8-Non-Western Studies (6 credits)
Seniors:	Core 9——Toward a Christian Humanism (6 credits)
	Core 10—Christianity and the Human Situation (3 credits)

B. Content of the individual segments of Core

Core 1 tries to encounter the student exactly where he is and invites him to reflect on human achievements and crises in this century. A whole range of academic disciplines——philosophy and theology, the natural and behavioral and social sciences, literary and artistic expression——participates in this attempt to shed light on the meaning and problems of the contemporary human situation.

Cores 2, 3, and 4 chronologically investigate the historical roots of contemporary ideas and institutions as well as the phases of development through which such ideas and institutions have passed. The faculties of each of these Core segments have come up with distinctive and original approaches to the periods of Western history with which they are concerned.

The junior year shifts into a different format, in that concurrent 3-credit programs in both semesters take the place of the previous single 6-credit blocks. The interaction of the two programs of the junior year——Core Science (Cores 5-6) and Non-Western Studies (Cores 7-8)——sets the stage for what could be the most fruitful portion of Core for the student. The "story of man as told by science", so influential a constituent of Western Culture, is paralleled with the alternative views of man and his place in the universe elaborated in African, Indian, Chinese and Japanese cultures.

A return to the contemporary scene rounds off the final year of Core. Core 9 attempts to reflect on the human value and ultimate meaning of all the materials encountered in the previous Core experience. Currently, the three focal questions considered in Core 9 have to do with the nature of man, the nature of religion, and the specific characteristics of the Christian faith. The second semester of the senior year involves a seminar (Core 10), often closely connected with the student's academic major, in which the student has the opportunity to do an in-depth study of some of the important ethical and/or religious aspects of contemporary problems. Seminars are conducted in the areas of political life, business, the arts, communications, science, and on the topics of respect for life, faith and reason, the ethics of economic development, and quite a few more.

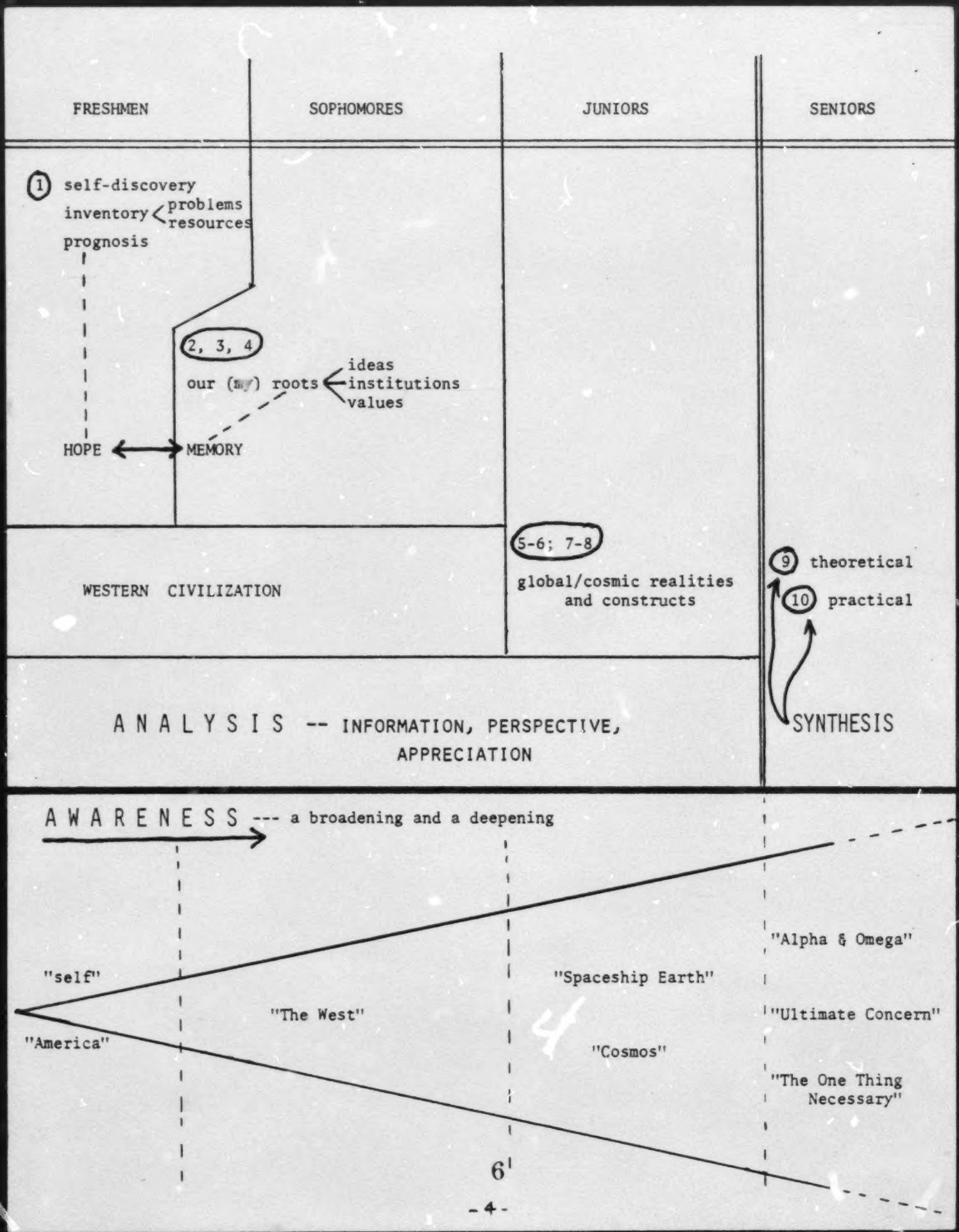
C. The overall unity of the program

As the necessary complement to these brief descriptions of the individual segments of Core, it is important to stress the overall integration of the segments into a single general education program which has a very definite rationale and developmental unity operative throughout all four years. The following diagram (page 4) and the accompanying paragraphs should clarify the overall thrust of the Core Program.

The first semester of the freshman year begins with "The Contemporary Situation" because the main objective given to Core 1 is self-discovery and self-assessment. The student is invited to take inventory of his personal and our communal problems and resources: As a young man or woman in twentieth century America, what outlooks and values have I adopted? What can we reasonably expect to achieve——answered differently from Kurt Vonnegut's "Fourteenth Book of Bokonon"*

*Question: What Can a Thoughtful Man Hope for Mankind on Earth, Given the Experience of the Past Million Years?

Answer : Nothing. (Cat's Cradle, Chapter 110)


FRESHMEN
SOPHOMORES
JUNIORS
SENIORS
1
self-discovery
inventory
problems
resources
prognosis
2, 3, 4
our (my) roots
ideas
institutions
values
HOPE
MEMORY
WESTERN CIVILIZATION
5-6; 7-8
global/cosmic realities
and constructs
9 theoretical
10 practical
SYNTHESIS
ANALYSIS -- INFORMATION, PERSPECTIVE,
APPRECIATION
AWARENESS --- a broadening and a deepening
"self"
"America"
"The West"
"Spaceship Earth"
"Cosmos"
"Alpha & Omega"
"Ultimate Concern"
"The One Thing
Necessary"
6

——in the remaining years of this century? What are the prospects and hopes for creating a meaningful personal existence and a just society?

The time span allotted to Core 1 extends back to 1900, not for arithmetic convenience or to relieve other Cores of some years of content, but to attain a very specific purpose. The student's edifice of meaning was constructed under the influence of his parents and grandparents, as well as that of peers, teachers and so on. By becoming acquainted with the events and hopes and crises of those immediately ancestral generations, the student can discover the impact of the past on his living present, the relevance of history to human existence. This is not approached in service to any particular philosophy of history, whether spiral or cyclical or whatever, but in terms of the simple facts of life that our meanings are shared meanings and that our existence is an historical existence. The complement to the future-looking dimension of hope in human existence is the past regarding dimension of memory. With the establishment of this dialectic between hope and memory, Core 1 opens the student up to the historical sections of Core in the following three semesters.

Cores 2, 3, and 4——the second semester of the freshman year and the two semesters of the sophomore year——seek to encounter the origins of Western Civilization and follow its subsequent development. How have the Hebrews, Greeks, Romans and early Christians laid the foundations of what we call "the West" (Core 2)? How have Graeco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian sources, albeit over centuries of development and evolution, contributed to the world we now inhabit?

In Core 3, "The Middle Ages", the manner in which the cultural values of the ancient world were preserved and modified in the years from 100 to 1600 in the West is studied. The particular approach taken in this Core, because it is individual men who make history and build civilizations, is one which focuses on individual persons who contributed in a very special way to the cultural evolution of the West, leading up to the emergence of what we (somewhat chauvinistically) call "the modern world". In ending with the Renaissance, Core 3, from one point of view, closes a cultural cycle with Core 2 in that the Renaissance looked backwards to the origins of the West in ancient Greece and Rome; but, from another point of view, the seeds of the modern world and rumblings of the radical changes about to occur are there too.

The modern world is approached, in Core 4, in an at least partly dialectical fashion by studying the interplay of currents of thought from 1600 to 1900. The Baroque, the Enlightenment, the conflict between Romanticism and Realism, the Revolutions, the Age of Progress——especially the images of Man, of Nature and of God that go along with each of these——such is the complex material of Core 4. Overall, however, the achievements and disappointments of those 300 years do exhibit a certain logic of development which makes understandable the ambivalence and trepidation with which Western man entered the twentieth century. Thus, at the end of Core 4 the student has worked his way, with enriched historical understanding and developed critical acumen, back to the starting point of Core 1.

Though Cores 1 through 4 did attempt to deal with 4,000 years of Judaeo-Christian tradition and 2,800 years of Western Culture, there is still a greater challenge to the imagination and sensitivity of the student to come in the junior year. Non-Western Core (Cores 7 & 8) transports the student out of the West in order to invite him to meet and to learn to appreciate fellow human beings who have created cultures quite different from his own. The great

cultures of India, China, Africa and Japan, whether in terms of complementarities or contrarieties or correctives, have much to teach us, in spite of our boasts of Western superiority.

In addition, the "Story of Man" that science tells, in the concurrent Core Science segment (Cores 5 & 6), is a story which speaks of billions of years of cosmic and biological evolution and of a cosmos of fantastic dimensions, but which is still man's home. If Cores 2, 3 and 4 put us in touch with our cultural roots, Core Science reveals how intimately our human lives are connected with all of life and with basic cosmic processes: our cosmic and biological roots. The two programs of the junior year do however converge—— whether by political, economic, ecological, metaphysical, or religious paths ——on the reality of the oneness of the family of man.

Finally, the first three years of Core (Cores 1 through 8) can be regarded as more analytic than anything else, in the sense that they provide information about, perspective on, and appreciation of all things human. The senior year proposes to tie together all of the preceding materials of the Core Program in a synthesis that is deeply and thoroughly Christian. Core 9 works at such a synthesis in terms of theory and principle, whereas Core 10 applies those principles in a spirit of Christian responsibility in a world where man is more and more assuming conscious and deliberate control of the course of evolution.

D. Progress from Core 1 through Core 10

Another rather interesting perspective on the total Core Program lies in the broadening and deepening of awareness that occurs as the students move from one semester to the next. Without restricting individuals to this pace or rhythm of development and recognizing sadly but realistically that it does not work for everyone, the focus of the content of the Core segments and the invitation to value commitment do significantly grow from semester to semester. In Core 1, the focus is the "self" in twentieth century "America" (although the limitations of this focus are revealed in the final sections of Core 1); Cores 2 through 4 broaden that perspective to include the origins, development and recent condition of "The West"; with the junior year of Core the student is invited to cope with the concepts of "cosmos" and "Spaceship Earth"; and in Cores 9 and 10 questions of ultimate meaning and deepest commitment are treated, the "Alpha and Omega" of human existence and "the one thing necessary" of the New Testament.

E. Some pedagogical specifics

The mechanics of the Core Program are structured in such a way as to respect both the interdisciplinary and the personalist dimensions of Core. The typical 6-credit segment of Core involves four contact-hours per week: two hour-long lectures in the College Auditorium (at which the entire freshman, sophomore, junior or senior class is in attendance), and two hour-long discussions in a group of about 18 students and one professor. What might at first seem to be an overly generous allocation of credit hours to the normal semester of Core—— six credits for four contact-hours——is more than adequately justified in view of the very large amount of reading and writing assigned in the program. And though the preceding comment emphasizes individual student work, it is generally in the discussion sessions that the readings, the lectures and the student's own reflections really come into focus.

The roles of a faculty member in the two scheduled parts of Core are quite different. As a lecturer in the Auditorium meetings, the professor presents himself as an expert in commenting on a reading assignment or a related topic in a scholarly yet pedagogically appropriate fashion. In the discussion situation, however, the professor often has to assume the position of a co-learner, since the topic under discussion may well come out of a field of study which is not his own area of specialization. The excitingly different types of faculty-to-faculty and student-to-faculty relationships which this structure demands and favors have radically revitalized the academic community of Saint Joseph's College.

IV. In the Seventh Year of Core...

Since the Core Program was implemented with the freshman class of September of 1969, Saint Joseph's College is in its seventh year (1975-76) of offering this innovative general education program. The graduating class of 1975 was the third class to have completed the full cycle of the Core curriculum. During these years, the program has been under the scrutiny of a whole battery of committees; it has been evaluated and revised on a year-by-year basis. Much has been accomplished, much still needs to be done, but a lot has been learned. Some of these lessons are well worth attention at this point.

Relationships among the academic departments have changed quite a bit. Professors from up to ten different departments have had to sit down together and come up with a single set of readings and lectures for the semester of Core with which they are charged. The same group has had to listen to one another lecture to the entire Core class (300+ students and 12 or so professors). These experiences, sometimes inspiring and sometimes frustrating, have made the faculty come to know and respect one another much more than before Core.

Professors have also carried a wealth of materials, ideas and methods out of Core into the course offerings of their departments. The discussion approach used in Core has given many professors a new respect and confidence in their students. And students, with an extensive common fund of Core readings and lectures, have carried discussion of issues into the dining halls and dormitories. Thus the Core Program not only complements the specialization the student acquires in his major, but it actually strengthens the major programs at the college. Saint Joseph's College is definitely of the opinion that it can offer students an educational experience which combines a strong major with an exceptional general education program, and that both programs gain from such a combination.

Development of the Core Program's full potential is far from complete. The college received a deeply appreciated and very timely assist from Lilly Endowment in 1975, when the foundation supported the greater part of the operation of the program for the 1974-75 academic year. A two-year continuation of that grant will provide the funds for support and enrichment of Core, making possible completion of several development projects. For example, due to a whole range of different circumstances, we have not yet been able to involve all of the departments of the college in Core; of course this situation must be changed if Core is to be a program truly conducted by the whole academic community. The program has to respond more effectively to the students' needs for skill development, since Core has replaced the basic

composition and speech general education requirements. Physical facilities and audio-visual capabilities will have to be upgraded in the near future to serve the needs of Core. More money ought to be invested in bringing top-notch speakers and performing artists on campus. And, most importantly perhaps, we must somehow develop a greater epistemological awareness, a sensitivity to differences in method and limitations of method, on the part of our faculty.

V. Conclusion

Saint Joseph's College is definitely committed to the Core curriculum and the humanizing and liberating educational experience which it represents. Core expresses this college's manner of structuring a liberal arts education which respects both the concern for human values of the liberal arts tradition and the career preparation and specialization which the contemporary world demands of college graduates.

Ultimately, educational institutions and their programs, whatever they may be, exist for the benefit of students. In closing, then, a sample of student impressions of the impact of Core on them is most appropriate.

> "The greatest thing about Core is that I have a chance to ask questions about things that have always interested me. The discussion groups are a great experience in freedom of sharing thoughts and feelings with a group. Core not only attempts to answer basic questions that one has but goes further and constantly challenges the seeker with more and deeper questions."
>
> George Mills, Mathematics Major
> Class of 1975

> "The Core Program is the foundation of my future. It gives me a feeling for persons, places and things. It takes me out of my self-centered shell and exposes me to other cultures---so completely new, different and exciting. Through the Core experience, I am more willing to understand and respect others, rather than be indifferent to them."
>
> Barbara Doan, History Major
> Class of 1976

> "I have felt an urgent need to understand where I came from---how did man's thinking and self-understanding evolve? I honestly feel that Core, integrated and well-presented as it was, helped me to gain my bearings in history, to see how what has gone before has influenced what is now and ultimately to understand myself and society better. I think that Core provides a background into all the humanities that would enable a student to compete effectively and comfortably in graduate study in any of several fields. And Core lends a sense of security and confidence to the student as she faces future life in general---for she now has the mental tools with which to adjust to and accept problems, and to devise proper solutions in steering a meaningful course through the twentieth and into the twenty-first century."
>
> Susan Hoffman, Philosophy Major
> Harvard Graduate School

The following pages contain detailed information on the content of the various segments of Core (i.e., readings and lectures).

For more detailed information on individual segments of the Core Curriculum, the names of the Directors of these segments are listed below:

Core 1 -- "The Contemporary Situation"
Dr. Charles Kerlin

Core 2 -- "Hebrew and Graeco-Roman Heritage"
Fr. Dominic Gerlach

Core 3 -- "The Middle Ages"
Fr. Ambrose Heiman

Core 4 -- "The Modern World"
Mrs. Anne-Marie Egan

Cores 5 & 6 -- "Foundations of Science"
Dr. Lyle Sleeman

Cores 7 & 8 -- "Non-Western Studies"
Dr. J. Phillip Posey

Core 9 -- "Toward a Christian Humanism"
Dr. Robert Wood

Core 10 -- "Christianity & the Human Situation'
Fr. William Kramer

All that is needed by way of address is the name of the Core Director and the following:

Saint Joseph's College

Rensselaer, Indiana 47978